

home design real estate



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Those three words sum up the notions behind *Seven Days'* quarterly supplement about home design and real estate. If you're in the market to buy, sell, make a move or spruce up your decor, we aim to inspire.



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ON THE COVER

Cover: Bluff Cottage by Birch Lane Building
Photo courtesy of Birch Lane Building



layar

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Keep it local with this deliciously simple recipe.

CHEESE TRADERS

BALL, NIGLET IN MAC 'N' CHEESE

8 Tbs (1 cup) Vermont Creamery roasted butter
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1 qt. Kraft® Book Farm Organic Whole Milk
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Step 1
Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Add pasta to boiling salted water and cook for 11 minutes. Meanwhile, heat milk over medium heat, but keep from boiling.

Step 2
Melt 6 Tbs butter in a large pot, add flour and whisk over low heat for about 2 minutes. Add heated milk and continue whisking until thick and smooth. Remove from heat.

Step 3
Add Cheddar, Gruyere, Blue Cheese and salt & pepper to taste. Stir in cooked pasta, mix well, and pour into a large baking dish. Top with bread crumbs and drizzle of remaining butter. Bake for 35-40 minutes until bubbly and browned.

Enjoy!

**Get cozy by adding some cooked Vermont beans and a dash of ketchup to the cheese mixture before baking.*

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From the
Ground
Up

*Richmond's Birdseye
Building designs
with an eye to the
landscape*

BY PAMELA POLSTON

Charmelle
Harris
Shelburne

PHOTO COURTESY
OF BIRDSEYE
BUILDING

The menu bar on Birdseye Building's website immediately conveys what the text means by "full-service custom home design-build company." It means more than drawing up plans and constructing a house, though the Richmond-based business excels at that. Click on any of the other tabs — "Woodworking," "Metal & Glass," "Sitework" and "Energy" — to see just how Birdseye has evolved over three decades.

Yep, the company can manufacture a unique metal handrail, carve out a metal driveway or install a tidy array of solar collectors. Yet Birdseye is still best known, and justifiably so, for its houses.

When John Seibert and Jim Coervue launched Birdseye 33 years ago, they may not have anticipated the diversity of the residences they would eventually construct: a minimalist box cantilevered on a lakeside hill, a sprawling New England vernacular farmhouse, an urban oasis of warm woods and native stone. And, like any young entrepreneurs, they surely had no idea how their company would grow — that it would add designers and architects, or artisans in wood, metal and glass. Or that it would eventually become employee-owned.

Throughout Birdseye's diverse styles and services a theme remains: fine craftsmanship.

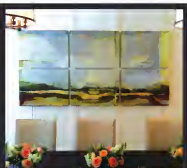
Though Birdseye is an ESOP (a company with an employee stock ownership plan), its 17 employees may also work independently. During a tour of the company's ranching quarters on Harrington Road, principal architect Brian Mac — who started Birdseye Design 17 years ago — explains that "ideally, we all work on the same project, but I might take a job elsewhere and work with other builders and the [Birdseye] builders

might work with other architects." The wood and metal shops, run by Jonathan Kelenoscher and Chelsea Bask, respectively, also create products independently. Seibert and Coervue, Mac says, act as general contractors, do the company's manufacturing and "oversee everything."

A Detroit native, Mac recalls a visit to Vermont some two decades ago that included taking in a Revue and Pappet Circus. The experience helped sell him on the state, he says, and serendipity quickly introduced him to "a group of people involved in Birdseye." Originally he wanted to learn woodworking — "I helped build the Pitcher Inn [in Warren]," Mac notes. "But eventually I'd had enough of working construction, and I got back into architecture."

It was a good move. He counts his own Waterbury home among the many he's designed over 17 years. Though some jobs have taken him out of state, most of Birdseye's projects are within an hour and a half of its Richmond HQ.

Nearly all of that work is residential, but one company photo depicts a commercial space: Lucy's Next Door. Building's line of Pease Chase Café on Cherry Street knows about its other restaurant, which is, well, right next door.



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From the Ground Up 475

Mac says he designed it as something of a flyer to owners Charles Reeves and Holly Chase — he's a fan of their popular breakfast, too. The windows and Lucky sign display artisanal craftswork, and, along with the curly wood exterior, speak to Mac's eloquent design vocabulary.

After the Lucky job, Mac says, he got "a ton of calls" about other commercial

IN THE END
IT'S ALL ABOUT
MAKING IT PRETTY.

BRIAN MAC

projects, but none has yet materialized. He doesn't seem to mind, since 15 projects, large and small, are on his docket at the moment.

Spending for himself and for his dog collectively, Mac describes an aesthetic that is "grounded in place first." When people buy a property, he notes, it's "concern about the landscape." "I like to keep things quiet and beautiful, but fun



all about providing what an architect can do," Mac says. Sustainability is important, too, and not just for practical considerations. "It's sustainable because it's beautiful," he says. "In the end, it's all about making it pretty."

Beebe's model itself seems to be

a sustainable one: Everyone, from the designers to the diggers to the carpenters and craftsmen, is on the same page, each person's expertise informing the others. "We are all integral to what's essential in the project," Mac concludes. 🍏



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Getting Warmer

What's the best hottie for your house?

BY MARY ANN LICKTEIG

Not long after I moved to Vermont, someone informed me — by way of helpful orientation — that my new home state enjoys nine months of winter and three months of damn poor skiing.

In previous years, I've dug out of some epic snow dumps (Vermont's Day 2007, anyone?), justified buying multiple winter coats, come to a deep understanding of how fairness could have dozens of words for snow, and added the terms "nor'easter" and "stuck cold" to my vocabulary. As someone whose fingers go numb in the grocery store's dairy section, it's high time I learned how to take the chill off.

My husband and I are shopping for a fireplace insert. Basic homework taught us that we have three fuel options: natural gas, wood and pellets. And burning logs in the fireplace isn't an option. Wood-burning fireplaces typically lose more heat than they generate. "We call them wood wasters," said Roy L'Esperance, who owns the Cheshire Stove Fireplace Shop in Shelburne. Also, one needs up the house, owing to a cold exterior chimney that can't help but comply with the laws of thermodynamics.

I arrived at the Cheshire Stove Fireplace Shop, thinking we'd settled on a wood-burning insert. Then I met L'Esperance. "Well, the wood's romantic, cozy and traditional, and a very practical alternative when you have expensive heat sources such as propane or oil," he said, knowing that we hate natural gas. But then he pointed a remote control at the Fireplace Xtremadue 446 and clicked. Within two seconds, flames danced in the natural-gas insert. His embers glowed and my resolve melted.

Despite that revelatory moment, we haven't yet settled on a purchase. My husband still rallies for wood, arguing that it affords honest work for our kids. While I also prefer wood for its authenticity, I suspect the work it entails would translate to far fewer cozy nights in front of a fire.

To pick the free-standing stove or fireplace insert that's right for you, you need to consider your lifestyle, your access to fuel and whether you want the unit to provide ambience or the lion's share of your heating — which all three fuel options can do.

And consider this: In addition to choosing fuel type, you need to pick a material. Stone and inserts commonly come in three: steel, cast iron and caststone. Steel is the strongest, heats the fastest and loses heat the fastest. Cast iron and caststone offer softer heat. They take longer to heat up and radiate heat longer, with caststone being the slowest to heat

and to cool.

Read on for insight from L'Esperance, as well as from Lee Miller, an installer and salesman at Stove & Plug Works in Williston; and Adam Sherman, who runs the Biomass Energy Resource Center at Vermont Energy Investment Corporation. And read some tips on fireplace safety and what to do after a fire.

Pellet

THE PROS: Pure sawdust compressed into cylindrical pellets that look like moist food, these burn hot and clean. The units are thermostatically controlled, blowers circulate heat, and you don't have to have a traditional chimney. Eight years ago, Sherman put a pellet stove in his new home in Richmond, which had propane heat. He paid \$4,000 for a Harmon stove, rated for 40,000 BTUs per hour on which he now relies to provide 100 percent of the space heat for his 1,800-square-foot house. "We paid for that investment in less than six months," Sherman said.

Pellets are more efficient than cord wood — though the wood industry doesn't regulate efficiency on particular manufacturers' claims quite as well. Another plus: They're wood, and we grow wood in Vermont.

We think about eating locally: people should also think about heating locally. Sherman suggested. He noted that forests comprise 76 percent of Vermont and are an important part of the state's working landscape. Yet, when it comes to fuel, Vermonters use 145 million gallons of heating oil each year, Sherman said. At \$4 per gallon, that's \$584 million leaving the state



THE CONS: Though credited with being cleaner than firewood pellets are dusty, which can bother people prone to asthma. L'Esperance pointed out, units rely on electricity and require the most consumer maintenance of the options. Owners must empty ash once or twice a week, ensure that air holes are clear (don't let them get two or three times weekly) and clean the heat exchanger monthly. Equipped with motherboards and multiple meters, these units have more parts to break. While the fire can be mesmerizing, it doesn't have very many fireplace friends. You like a blowtorch? L'Esperance said.

WOOD'S ROMANTIC, COZY AND TRADITIONAL, AND A VERY PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE

NOT L'ESPERANCE

Natural gas

THE PROS: Clean, quick and economical, gas can be controlled by a thermostat, or a remote, and used without a traditional chimney or electricity — though you wouldn't have use of the latter in a blackout. Compared with cordwood and pellet stoves, gas is the most efficient and emits the least particulate matter, its ideal for people living in the Chittenden and Franklin county towns that are an natural gas lines. Libenrice said.

When you're doing gas, you're looking at a busy lifestyle where you can basically have a fire for 20 minutes while you're having your coffee in the morning! And you can have warmth without turning on your central heating system in an early spring or late fall — the so-called "shoulder seasons."

THE CONS: It's a fossil fuel sourced elsewhere. "The flames can leave much to be desired for some people," Miller said. Though manufacturers have improved the appearance over the years, critics still find that the flames look mechanical.



Cord wood

THE PROS: Traditionally, Ambrose Miller calls wood the biggest heater for the money. And of course, it works without electricity. "In a pinch, you can burn just about anything if you need to," Miller said. Libenrice said wood is ideal for people who live on 10 acres and outside Burlington have trees that need to be cleaned up and can substitute wood dollars for oil or propane dollars. And he said you get to cut and stack wood — important labor in the green economy.

THE CONS: You have to cut and stack wood. Wood needs to dry, it can be messy. You have to have a chimney. Cordstove can build up though stoves and inserts typically offer secondary burns to help prevent that. Of the three fuels, cordwood is the least efficient

and emits the most particulates (shrinkin' noses).

But with new technology, both wood and pellet units have improved in both these areas. Look for the permanent metal EPA certification label on the back of the stove. ♡



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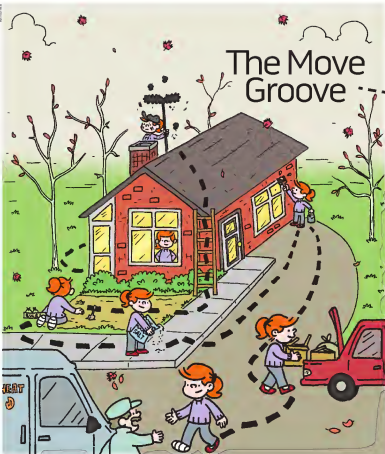
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The Move Groove



Real estate experts offer tips to prepare your home for the spring market

BY KEN PICARD

So your house has finally reached maximum capacity. When you bought that cozy two-bedroom, one-bathroom ranch, you were single and had more space than you needed.

Fast-forward 10 years. Now you've got a spouse, two kids, a dog and enough garden tools and sporting goods to start a summer camp. The kids share one bed, and the novelty of the entire family crowded into a single bathroom each morning has worn thin.

In short, it's time for new digs. But not many sellers want to put their house on the market in the winter, when much of its curb appeal is buried, like the curb itself, beneath three feet of snow.

Rear star, Vermont's top estate professionals say there's a lot that sellers can do in advance to prepare their house for sale in the spring—or sooner, if they're willing to list it in January and February. Because many of these projects take time and money, the experts recommend starting soon, so the "For Sale" sign can sprout with the crocuses.

1. LET THERE BE LIGHT

Before the weather gets too cold, rake out gardens, trim empty flowerpots and store patio furniture, recommends Bobbi Handy Holmes, a real estate agent with Century 21 Jack Associates in South Burlington. Though lawns and gardens never look their best from late fall to early spring, putting down fresh mulch and bagging a seasonal wreath on the front door can add a splash of color to an otherwise drab-looking exterior.

Ditto for repairing screens and sealing windows before the mercury falls below freezing. Shiny windows

and open blinds not only brighten a house, Handy Holmes says, but also make it look bigger. As she puts it, "It's all about first impressions."

2. DECLUTTER AND DE-TOXOTCHKE

Your prized collection of miniature high-heeled shoes might be worth thousands on eBay, but you'd be hard-pressed

to find a real estate agent who's ever sold a home based on its abundance of knick-knacks.

For spring sellers, fall and winter are excellent times to box up those dear collectors, pore through the basement and a closet, and purge one's house of old clothes, books and other household items that won't go to the next house. Clear off countertops and store or toss the clutter. "We all have our clutter spots, and it's hard to live in a house and sell it at the same time," Handy Holmes says. "But it's impressive to walk into a home where it looks like the seller really wants to sell."



Caral Academie, with Goldwell Becker Hedrick & Bourdette Realty in Burlington, suggests donating those odds and ends to Goodwill, Red Cross, the Salvation Army or the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program.

3. FRESHEN THOSE WALLS—AND LOSE THE WALLPAPER!

After you've decluttered, a fresh coat of paint is the cheapest and easiest house improvement project there is. Audette suggests neutral colors, such as off-white or cream, and recommends getting rid of wallpaper, especially if it's peeling, and replacing it with a solid paint job.

4. KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The last thing a seller wants is to learn about a major deficiency in a house's roof, plumbing, foundation or electrical system after that house is under contract. A building inspection in advance lets you know exactly which problems may lower your asking price—or scuttle the deal entirely.

In some cases, new laws and building codes have been added since the house last changed hands. For a Vermont house that hasn't sold in at least a decade, they include laws related to photoelectric smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and overflow tanks on water heaters.

Audette also advises that if you're planning to sell your house, you should make an appointment to get it inspected by the fire marshal—so the requirement prior to sale.



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The Move Groove

5. CLEAN IS GREEN

As homeowners head into winter, Aardre suggests that homeowners get their homes and chimneys professionally cleaned and inspected. If the house has an oil tank, get it checked and certified by a professional — another new requirement before sale in Vermont.

A clean heating system doesn't just make the house smell better, fuel warmer and last well maintained. It also lowers your heating costs — another selling point for potential buyers.

6. GET YOUR PAPERWORK IN ORDER

The vast majority of people who sell their house buy another one. All the real estate experts agree that if you're planning to buy as well as sell next year, it behooves you to get your paperwork and finances in order in advance. That means everything from obtaining copies of your existing mortgage and deed to obtaining preapproved letters from a lender.

Also, if you're doing any exterior work, such as additions or new decks, check that you've obtained all the necessary permits — and ensure that they're on file with your taxes or city clerk



IT'S IMPRESSIVE TO
WALK INTO A HOME
WHERE IT LOOKS
LIKE THE SELLER
REALLY WANTS
TO SELL.

ROBBI HANDY HOLMES

7. FOR SOME, COLD IS GOLD

While most sellers prefer to wait until their front lawn is lush before planting a "For Sale" sign on it, Marie Waulf, director of marketing at Long McLaughry Real Estate in South Burlington, points out that many sellers now list their homes throughout the winter. Why? Because buyers are out there, especially after years of sluggish sales.

This year, Waulf notes, while the Vermont housing market peaked at about 5,000 homes for sale in July, 3,560 homes were for sale in January. And, while 630 homes sold in July, the lowest month for buyers, 354 moved in January. In short, she says, people who house-hunt in winter are often more motivated today, owing to a new job or other life transition, and may be willing to pay more.

"People think that nobody is buying real estate over the winter," Waulf says, "but that's just not true."

If you're selling in winter, she says, punt lights, inside

and out, on timers and post seasonally appropriate photos of the house online. Also, if your house is already empty, turn on the heat, at least while potential buyers are walking through it.

"I've been to some of these houses where the heat is off," Waulf says, "and people don't stick around so long."

Even if your house doesn't sell in the winter, having it on the market leaves you better positioned to attract buyers who will return with the robes of spring. ♥

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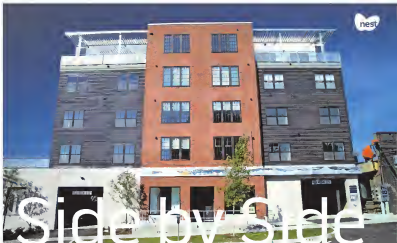


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Side by Side

Touring two of Burlington's newest housing developments

BY XIAN CHIANG-MAREN



APARTMENTS



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SEE PAGE 5

Who wouldn't want to live in Burlington? The Queen City's got it all: a bustling downtown, leafy residential streets (at least for half the year), the waterfront and proximity to great skiing — not to mention all the restaurants, movies, museums and theaters.

Until recently, there seemed to be just one thing that Burlington didn't have: new apartment units. Though the city's older and historic apartments have their charm, renters and buyers on the hunt for newer, sleeker shades have had few options. Despite demand for market-rate rental units and condos, development of new housing complexes slowed to a crawl during the recession.

"For many years we didn't see a lot of new apartment buildings being built in Burlington, because the numbers just didn't work," says Erik Blockera, a partner at Redstone Commercial Group.

Now, though, interest rates are low, and new housing projects are on the rise around town. More than 900 new rental units have been proposed for Burlington, according to estimates by real estate advisory firm Allen & Brooks, as *Seven Days* reported earlier this year.

Those searching for a contemporary apartment in the Queen City are finally in luck. Next week marks two new Burlington developments — the Stratos building on St. Paul Street and SilverSmith Commons in North Winooski Avenue — to site up some of the new digs.

Stratos

1113 St. Paul Street, Burlington
802/443-1113 or stratosvt.com

Located just a block from City Hall Park and the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, with urban and lake views from their balconies, the condominiums in the Stratos development, practically sell themselves. "It's one of the best locations in all of Burlington," boasts Bill Desrosiers, the project's real estate agent and owner at 802/443-1113 or stratosvt.com. **▶▶**

SILVERSMITH COMMONS

230-260 North Winooski Avenue, Burlington
Redstone Commercial Group 802/340-3400 redstonevt.com

Two- and three-story buildings on North Winooski Avenue — with a still-available retail unit on the ground floor — form SilverSmith Commons. It's one of several Redstone Commercial Group projects currently under way in Burlington. **▶▶**



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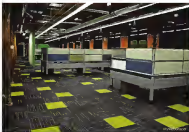
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Stratos » PG. 16

The 30,224-square-foot building has a sleek, shiny facade and contains 24 condominiums that range in size from 200 to 1,000 square feet. The aesthetic is modern and minimalist: white walls, hardwood floors or plush carpets in neutral shades, big glass windows, aluminum framing on the balconies.

"There's an incredible amount of glass within the unit, they're very bright overall," says Desautels. "They are a bit more crisp than some of the other offerings you find in the area."

The units have been in high demand. Only one remains on the market, though construction just wrapped in June (one other condo is currently available for rent). "We sold most of them early," Desautels explains. Residents include city centers, young professionals and "a few snowbirds."

The smaller Stratos condos sell for about \$100,000, while the larger units with lake views climb into the low \$400,000 range. Several owners who don't live in the building are renting out units, for about \$2,500 per month.

Desautels says that's "reasonably affordable" given the location and the quality of materials that went into building the apartments. There's also covered parking and laundry. "The big amenity is being downtown," Desautels says.

In fact, he was so sold on Stratos that he moved in himself. "I downsized from a 2,000-square-foot home out in the country," Desautels says. "And I'm loving it. I absolutely love, love, love it. Why? Because it's a simpler lifestyle. And I can walk to everything I need to do."



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Silversmith apart

Silversmith was originally intended to be a condominium building, but Redstone decided to develop the units as market-rate rental housing with the option of transitioning to condos later on.

The modern, light-filled apartments retain a condo look, though. Averaging 750 square feet, they have hardwood floors, gray and white walls and brand-new, energy-efficient appliances. The building contains two one-bedrooms and 20 two-bedrooms. Redstone is currently leasing the units starting at \$1,550.

Hallways and common areas are decked out in deep navy and gray, with the occasional exposed cement wall—in the basement, for instance, which contains coin-operated laundry facilities and tenant storage lockers. The location is also a plus. Popular Old North Road eateries such as Thorne

Bakery & Café and Pho Hung are a short stroll from the front door, and Church Street is just a 10-minute walk.

For Redstone partner Erik Haskett, Silversmith Commons has personal significance. He lives around the corner and believes that the development is a positive step for the neighborhood.

Silversmith tenants are mostly young and/or single professionals and graduate students. "People living here strengthen the market for retail," Haskett points out. "They have a little bit of disposable income to spend at the bakeries and stores."

"There's been a lot of great revitalization in this neighborhood for over 20 years," he says. "The place we're been missing is market-rate [rental] housing. What makes neighborhood healthy is diversity across incomes."



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Wardrobe Triumph

How to make a stand-alone closet

BY XIAN CHIANG-WAREN

Nothing kills the look of a bedroom like clothing clutter. I'm just as guilty as the next person of tearing through drawers looking for one specific thing, and hurrying out the door, leaving the mess right where it fell — for days.

OK, so some people are more inclined to have messy bedrooms than others. In my defense, though, it's been a while since I've had a proper place to store my clothes. As most people who live in dormitories or shared living quarters know, all rooms are not created equal, and it can be tricky to figure out who gets which one.

There's the room with the view, the room with the private bathroom, the room with the exposed brick wall, and the room with the big, walk-in closet. Or, in the case of the dwellings that my roommate and I have recently occupied, the room with the only closet. (She sleeps gets the closet. Her clothes are very nice!)

Materials



WARDROBE TRIUMPH: © JEFF

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Wardrobe Triumph

When moving day came around at the end of August, I packed my bags, loaded them into a big yellow Penske truck and noted that this time would be different. Our new place is way more spacious than the fairly cramped apartment we were leaving behind. But — *whaddya know?* — it also has only one bedroom with a closet.

Determined to solve this major household crisis of my youth once and for all, I did what any self-respecting twentysomething would do: I logged on to Pinterest.

Prohibitively, those crafty folks on the internet had a ton of do-it-yourself suggestions for those of us who'd run out of room in our closets, or simply didn't have one. If the Pinterest post were to be believed,

a range of simple, fool-proof options for attractive, stand-alone closets were at my fingertips.

A standing closet, I realized, could be made from just about any frame. The slacker in me was tempted to just hang up clothes in the corner (aside from a hand-chopped birch uplight). With caveat! With caveat! From antique ceiling beams, and maybe stuck some red candles (antique, wood, with original ink lettering) underneath for shoe storage. But I decided to challenge myself with a more involved project.

One standing closet in particular caught my eye: a frame made from two antique wooden ladders, connected by a closet rod fastened with pipe straps on the top rung, and simple plywood boards resting on the bottom rungs for shoe storage. I liked the clean lines, the reasonable size, the rustic look and that there weren't many steps or materials to figure out.

This Pinterest DIYer made it look so easy, but my experience turned out to be a bit more complicated. I searched the Burlington area for an affordable antique wooden ladder, but

it turns out antique wooden ladders are kinda fad thing. They're hard to find, and when you do find them, they're a little on the pricey side. (That means out of budget for those of us closet-less people still splitting the rent, or less.)

Plenty of home owners have an appealing range of well-designed standing closets, but at that point, I was determined to hang my clothes on something I'd made myself. As I took matters into my own hands — or rather, into the hands of the good people at *Home Depot* in Wilton — And it turns out that those DIY bloggers were right about one thing: You can make a functional standing closet frame out of just about anything.

At the store, I chose four pieces of rough,



IT TURNS OUT, THOSE DIY BLOGGERS ARE RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING:

YOU CAN MAKE A FUNCTIONAL STANDING CLOSET FRAME OUT OF JUST ABOUT ANYTHING.



shoofat full landscape timber (at \$6 a pop, these were a low-risk appeal), which sort of had the rustic look of the antique wooden ladder frame, without the clean lines and charmingly weathered white paint. At any rate, they were more interesting than two-by-fours. At a friendly suggestion, I didn't try to recreate the

ladder, but made the ends of the frame by "notching" the tops of the wood toward each other like a vating set — more structurally sound shape, I'm told.

Each set of two pieces of timber was attached at the top with black deep hinges (\$2 each), and again a foot or so off the floor by a one-foot piece of wood. I used pipe straps to fasten a wooden dowel (\$3), and you can use any branch, broomstick or rod to the top, where it rested neatly on the angled corners of the haque where the ladder pieces touched.

As a final finishing touch, I ran a board across the one by at the base for a shoe shelf, and — *voilà!* — I'd made my own standing closet, in less than an hour and for less than \$30. 🍷

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